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SUBJECT: NAKASONE ON JAPAN AND NUCLEAR ARMS

Classified By: AMBASSADOR J. THOMAS SCHIEFFER. REASONS: 1.4(B)(D)

11. (SBU) Summary: A proposal by former Prime Minister Nakasone that Japan study the option of acquiring nuclear weapons under certain conditions is drawing critical attention here. Although the original written proposal and Nakasone's subsequent remarks to the press are heavily caveated, media shorthand and receptive audiences may give the idea that Japan should "study the nuclear issue" a visibility and stature it would otherwise not deserve. End summary.

12. (U) On September 5 former Prime Minister Nakasone's think tank, the Institute for International Policy Studies, issued a report entitled "An Image of Japan in the 21st Century." Within the 26-page report are the following two lines: "Japan, maintaining its position as a non-nuclear weapons state and working to strengthen the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty system, should study the nuclear issue in order to be prepared in the event of tremendous future change in the international situation." In subsequent remarks to the press, Nakasone elaborated, saying "There are countries with nuclear weapons in the vicinity of Japan. We are currently dependent on U.S. nuclear weapons (as a deterrent), but it is not necessarily known whether that U.S. attitude will continue." Nakasone also reiterated that Japan's "first priority" is to maintain its non-nuclear weapons status and its second priority to strengthen the NPT system.

13. (U) "Nakasone Proposes Japan Consider Nuclear Weapons" reads the headline of the Japan Times September 6 front-page story. The vernacular press puts the story on the inside pages, but basically uses the same shorthand headline, with Tokyo Shimbun adding, "Nakasone's proposal, which might lead to abandonment of the three non-nuclear principles, is likely to create a stir."

14. (SBU) Asked to comment, several government-affiliated think-tankers declined to offer opinions to Embassy Tokyo. Shizuoka University Professor of International Relations Tetsuya Umemoto told us the report and Nakasone's remarks were nothing new, noting that the question of whether Japan should acquire nuclear weapons had been examined many times in the past and remained a legitimate topic of debate. In short, there was nothing to get excited about, he asserted.

15. (C) MOFA Security Policy Principle Deputy Director Matano agreed that the debate was not new, but acknowledged that Japan's neighboring countries might "overreact." Japan's official stance continues to be to rely on the U.S.-Japan

security relationship and the nuclear deterrence that it provides. As the only nation to have suffered from a nuclear bomb, public sentiment in Japan remains strongly against developing a nuclear capacity. The government has used its unique position in disarmament discussions in Geneva's Conference on Disarmament and other fora. Matano noted that North Korea's nuclear program and possible nuclear test have fueled public discussion of what was almost a taboo topic only a decade ago, but believed that sentiment both within and outside the government remained overwhelmingly against the domestic development of a nuclear deterrent capability.

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